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ABSTRACT

This report presents focal case studies of two working-class mothers who are building bridges between their individual homes and Parker Elementary (located in a small midwestern city) where both of their children attend school. The report delineates a study which examined how the literacy practices within the two women's households related to their roles at the school. The report then positions the critical issues surrounding the roles these women take in a consideration of the conditions necessary for inventing school communities. This report is one slice of data and analysis from a larger, long term, ethnographic study that seeks to understand how a sense of community can be established and nurtured in a highly diverse elementary school--the larger study is called "Inventing a School." The part of the report presented here states that data were collected on the two case studies for over two years and involved regular interactions with the mothers, formal interviews, observations in their households, and observations of the mothers in the school setting during events, parent-teacher conferences, and other activities. The report provides much naturalistic evidence of the various interactions which occurred during the study, illustrating with conversations among the participants. The report concludes that families must be viewed through a sociocultural perspective--teachers must be willing to share power with parents through respect for their knowledge and this, along with teachers' confidence to make decisions based on professional knowledge, will lead to the possibility of community in school. (Includes 5 figures; contains 38 references.) (NKA)

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Two Mothers' Literate Lives: Provocative Issues about Parent Involvement and Community Building in Schools

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> *Upon going to school, children from homes where the language is other than English, from homes struggling with poverty, or from cultures or ethnicity unlike those who hold power in this country frequently face the devaluing of their own reality and the disenfranchising of their own parents or primary caretakers* (Alma Flor Ada, in the preface to McCaleb 1994, p.vii).

This paper presents focal case studies of Pearl and Ronda, two working-class mothers who are building different bridges between their individual homes and Parker Elementary[1] where both of their children attend school. Each of their three children are described along a continuum of perceived "at risk" vs. "success" status at Parker, and each woman participates in unique ways in her children's educational experience. Together, they offer a close look at the issues involved in creating "community" in a diverse school setting, particularly in terms of parent involvement.

Building community in educational settings is to be aspired to according to many contemporary researchers. In fact, Peterson (1992) claims that a sense of community in a classroom "in itself is more important to learning than any method or technique" (p.2). Similarly, a major philosophical tenet of the transformative education McCaleb (1994) values and advocates is that "[e]ducation takes place within the context of a community" (p. 43). Whitmore & Crowell (1994) describe how a whole language philosophy offers the foundation for classrooms to invent themselves as communities within the conventions of formal instructional contexts. Wells & Chang-Wells (1992) elaborate on the same theme as their work aims to document the development of a "community of literate thinkers" (p. 9). The case studies of Pearl and Ronda will demonstrate that if community is to be achieved in schools, particularly with

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[1]All the names of the individuals and places have been changed to respect confidentiality. Parker Elementary is located in a small midwestern city. Pearl and Ronda are pseudonyms selected by the two mothers in this paper.

diverse populations, the realities of individual community members' lives must be accounted for, and their voices must be regularly heard.

It is well documented that some children receive educational experiences that are of lesser quality than children from white, middle- or upper-class homes where English is the native language (Anyon 1981, Goodlad 1984, Kozol 1991). Frequently there is a clash between the cultures and languages of teachers and students reflecting differences between home and school, be it by race (Heath 1983), culture (Phillips 1983), language (Moll & Diaz 1987), religion (Fishman 1992), poverty (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines 1988) or other condition. The language and literacy behaviors in homes where minority, non-English speaking and/or low SES children have been documented vary in terms of the functions that literacy serves for the family. Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988), Heath (1983), Gonzalez, et al. (1993), Hartle-Shutte (1993), among others, have documented the richness and variability in language and literacy uses in such households. They demonstrate that while these homes may not provide children with interactions or materials that are school-like, as do high SES, white, English-speaking homes, there is neither a lack of language or literacy. Moreover, to assess family literacy by comparing it against school literacy suggests a deficit orientation toward families, cultures, and non-English languages that serves to perpetuate the status-quo failure of such children in school (Taylor 1994, Auerbach 1989, Nieto 1996).

In light of the differences in uses of literacy and types of knowledge we know to exist between home and school, and the deficit orientation toward many families held by schools, the assumed role of parents in school must also be examined. Historically, researchers and experts have usually agreed that parents need help to recognize how they could support their children's

learning to be better citizens (K. Taylor 1981). Early parent involvement endeavors in Western educational settings meant educating parents as well as getting them engaged in school activities. According to Barbour and Barbour (1996), the first parent education program on record in this country was in 1815 in Portland, Maine. It was developed to instruct parents in proper child-rearing practices. Likewise, one of the goals in Froebel's kindergarten was to reach immigrant families and influence them to raise their children by the values and beliefs of the mainstream society. The National Parent Teacher Organization can be traced to 1897 when it, along with several other women's organizations, sponsored lectures and conferences and published materials stressing the importance of parents taking an active role in their children's education. Since that time, schools and communities have tried a variety of methods to educate parents who have often been seen as untrained and lacking knowledge about their own children and the best way to raise them. Thus, educational opportunities appeared everywhere including in the more recent past, television shows, university courses, and books by popular authors like pediatrician, Dr. Benjamin Spock.

Studies continue to support the contention of researchers in the early 20th century that parents' involvement in their children's education is essential (Brofenbrenner et al. 1984, Dunst & Paget 1991, Edwards & Young 1992, Heath & MacLaughlin 1989, Parke 1984). Currently, however, there are parent-education programs across the country creating innovations to counter the more typical deficit-oriented stance. In other words, these programs openly reject a view that suggests their role is to alter families to a mainstream way of parenting to fit the assumptions of the schools. Vopat (1994) describes the goal of The Parent Project in Michigan as a merger of school reform and advocacy for parents' efforts through the enactment of a workshop like many

children experience in elementary literacy classrooms, for example. Shockley et al. (1995) in Georgia and McCaleb (1994) in California have had promising results using parent journals and collaborative book authoring, respectively, with parents of minority groups. In Australia, Cairney and Munsie (1995) outline ways to move beyond parents as "token" members of a community to parents as partners. Our own family literacy group, called Parent-Kid-Teacher Investigators is aimed at using collaborative action research projects in the community to re-vision relationships between parents and teachers. These are a sampling of the current programs that intend to build on the strengths of families within a socio-contextual paradigm.

Interestingly however, while many schools and individual teachers express goals to increase parent involvement they simultaneously relegate parents to a position of trouble-maker, complainer, or demander in the school, or assume parents just don't care. Parent involvement in many settings continues to be narrowly defined by the tasks of selling items like wrapping paper, baking for bake sales, cutting and pasting for bulletin boards, and volunteering in the classroom. While we regard such activities as positive, even essential in current times of limited funding for public education, we also wonder: How does the status quo image of parent involvement and its implied expectations exclude parents who don't "fit"? How can in-depth knowledge about women who are differently involved with their children's education inform the school's expectations for parent involvement? What does it mean to live literate lives as involved parents in school?

In the following, we examine how the literacy practices within two working-class women's households relate to their roles in Parker Elementary School. We will then position the critical issues surrounding the roles these women take in a consideration of the conditions

necessary for inventing school communities.

The first mom is known as Pearl. No one in Pearl's family to date has graduated from high school, and she herself dropped out at the school's insistence when she became pregnant with the oldest of her six sons. Although rather uncomfortable in a school setting and understandably skeptical about the school's view of her family, Pearl provides an exceptional demonstration of literacy to her children in their home. She is a writer, poet, naturalist, and political activist as well as a welfare recipient.

The second mom is Ronda. Ronda is an exuberant woman who grew up in a family connected to the food industry and dreams of owning her own bistro one day. She describes herself as having been more successful socially than as a student in school, although she did graduate from high school and took some college courses. She also states that her mother, who she adores, was not able to be adequately involved in her education as a child. So Ronda holds her own children's schooling experiences in highest priority. She attends every event, leads the parent-teacher organization and secured a paid, part-time job in the school to be close to her children and to know their teachers and school life well. Paradoxically, Ronda frequently questions her position in the school community and expresses a feeling of powerlessness as she interacts with others.

The Data: Collection and Analysis Procedures

This report is one slice of data and analysis from a larger, long-term, ethnographic study that seeks to understand how a sense of community can be established and nurtured in a highly

diverse elementary school. The larger study is called *Inventing a School*.[2] The study involves researchers, parents and teachers in participant observation, interview, study groups and written reflections by the members of the community, called collaborative interpretations (Whitmore & Crowell 1994). Photography and video are used to complement other data sources. More specific to the case studies presented here, data collection has involved over two years of regular interactions with the two mothers, formal interviews, observations in their households as the families interact, and observations of the mothers in the elementary school setting during school events, parent-teacher conferences and so on. The initial goal for data collection was to describe the mothers' individual positions in the nested contexts (Wilcox 1982) depicted in Figure 1.

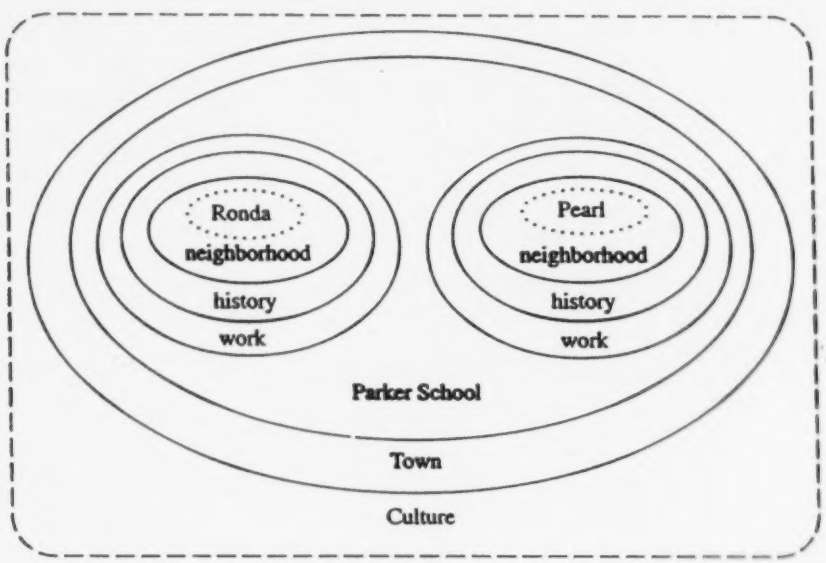

Figure 1. Nested contexts of case study mothers.

[2]The authors acknowledge the generous support provided through grants from the First in the Nation in Education Foundation and Pi Lambda Theta.

Although the research team didn't set out to develop case studies, or choose these two mothers in advance, both Pearl and Ronda came to be viewed over time as provocative examples of parenting in our day. We met Pearl when Marianne worked as a tutor with one of her sons. It wasn't long into their relationship before Marianne was besieged by Pearl's thoughtful and concerned questions about the literacy and schooling of all her children. Pearl requested more and more time with Marianne and asked that she involve all of the boys living in the household in planned literacy learning activities. In a similar manner, the questions Ronda raised related to issues such as multi-age grouping, whole language instruction, and invented spelling prompted her to join a family literacy group developed by our research project. She quickly became a central member of that group and continues to participate as the group moves into its third year of existence. Together, these women challenged us as researchers and educators to better understand the role of individual parents in a school that wants to be a "community."

Analysis involved a generative and long-term process of reviewing data in search of patterns and significant issues. Early coding of the data was built on the known work of Moll et al. (1990) regarding funds of knowledge, Auerbach (1989) and Taylor (1994) regarding socio-contextual views of families and Anyon (1980, 1981) regarding the relationship between social class, school curriculum and issues of power. Additional issues emerged through repeated reviews of data, peer debriefing sessions among the members of the research team (including collaborative interpretation with parents and teachers), and continued review of professional literature. These issues included considering teachers as professional decision-makers, assumptions about the role of parents in schools and the influence of school personnel perceived to be "experts" in the building. Cumulatively, these issues were interpreted in an explanation of

the conditions necessary for inventing a community in a diverse setting. Finally, the data was returned to once again to identify events, descriptions, and interactions that illustrate these issues.

It is not our goal to compare Pearl and Ronda, although it is difficult not to. We ask that as you read about their lives and families, their challenges and successes, you join us in our attempt to refrain from judging either of these women's decisions or lifestyles against each other or any other standard. Rather, we intend to describe and understand Pearl and Ronda as unique, separate individuals negotiating personal relationships with their children's elementary school.

Literacy Through the Eyes of "Pearl Bright"

Labeled "at risk" by the school, in many ways "Pearl Bright" and her family seem to be in crisis. Though working, the family income is well below poverty level. All three elementary-aged sons have difficulty with school literacy and have been named learning disabled. Despite this bleak portrait, Pearl is a surprisingly active literacy advocate within the family. She describes herself as a writer, a poet and an aspiring children's author. Their home is a uniquely rich environment where reading and writing happen for real purposes.

As a mother of six boys, Pearl has an extensive history of interaction with teachers and other school officials. Her relationship with the various schools her sons have attended over the years has been tense at best, largely based on mutual suspicion and mistrust. The schools see a family "at risk," their trailer court address, their free lunch status, parents who haven't graduated, the boys' holey shoes and their unkempt appearance--all indicators that enable the school to not only label them "at risk" but to question the "quality" of the home environment and ultimately the education that the boys receive.

Underlying the family's feelings toward the school is a skepticism about the value of the education that school offers and its ability to make a difference in the lives of their children. Pearl and her husband question not only the motives but the dedication and ability of those involved in teaching her sons. While Pearl acknowledges that each of her sons have had good teachers, she points out that unfortunately the bad teachers they have had along the way were the more powerful negative influences, impacting her sons' confidence and ultimately their motivation to complete school. When she talks about the schooling of her three older sons, who are now all grown with families of their own, her voice conveys the frustration and the powerlessness she felt when each of them quit school before graduating. At the same time, she speaks with conviction that her three youngest sons will not follow in their footsteps.

Undeniably Pearl's stance toward the school has also been shaped by her own predominately negative school experiences. When Pearl recalls her schooling, she tells stories of teachers' unfairness and her own memories of being humiliated and forced out of school. Pearl's earliest experiences in school were defined by the turmoil she faced because she was left handed, which immediately distinguished her as different. She explains, "My problem was that I had a teacher who didn't believe in people being left handed.... It really put me behind. I was so frustrated, I remember being in kindergarten and being so frustrated because I couldn't do what I wanted to do." Thus for Pearl, fleeting memories of Dick and Jane are intermingled with more distinct memories of the embarrassment of learning with her hand tied behind her back. Although she was a reader before she entered kindergarten, this achievement was overshadowed by her struggles to train herself to be right handed and her emerging difficulty with math.

Math was a problem for Pearl throughout her school career, precipitating bouts of anxiety and terror. She dreaded math class, especially the prospect of being called upon to solve problems on the board or the inevitable quiz. Pearl's experiences in math class are expressed in the following excerpt from her piece entitled, *The Quiz*.[3]

> *...Mr. Buckley begins to SLOWLY write multiplication on the blackboard. All eyes strain to see--those in the first row just as intensely as those in the last. 5 x 5 appears. That I know is 25. 6 x 5 is 30.... Now 8 x 8 equals 64. 9 x 9 is 81. All he writes I easily know. He begins to explain the quiz. " Each of you will be called in turn. Follow the board from left to right. You may not erase!"*
>
> *I'm ok, I know them all. My name is called. Instantly every muscle in my body strains to lift it from my seat. Eyes pierce my back as I walk to the blackboard. My problem is 5 x 5. My hand writes thirty five. Before the chalk leaves the board my mouth is dry. Dry as the blowing sands in a desert wind. I intensely have to pee. The shuffling of my feet and papers suddenly ceases. The last row can hear my breath. All eyes are spearing my back, like the spurs on a cockle burr. My tongue has swollen twice its normal size. I am frozen to the floor. I cannot face my peers. Blindly, I find my desk. Not a word has been spoken in the eternity since my error.*
>
> *Slowly the air is disturbed by the booming of HIS voice clearing. "N-E--X--T" crescendos from his voice. Rivers of perspiration are running down my temples. My body has slumped to a spineless blob spilling onto my chair. I silently pray "N-E--X--T" will fail like I did. So all thought is off me.*

Failure in math caused Pearl to not care to learn when she felt it was beyond her reach. Her sons' frequent queries while they do their homework have prompted her to memorize most of the multiplication tables, although she still stumbles on a few. As she puts it, "Sevens and nines totally astound me...9 x 9 is...81. I have finally learned. I think it is?" Though her uncertainty is unmistakable, she proclaims that if she had a pencil she could make sure her answer was correct.

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[3]The original spelling has been edited into conventional form.

While math may be her weakness, English was definitely her strength in school. Pearl describes herself as a voracious reader, one that doesn't like to put a book down until it is finished. Writing, however, is her first joy and an activity that is an essential part of her life. She devotes a significant amount of time to writing poems, the occasional short story, letters and other projects that spark her interest. One of the first poems she shared with Marianne, and her husband's favorite, is a poem she wrote for her son Logan. Below are the first two stanzas of her poem entitled *Sweet Dream.*

As I go to sleep tonight
I know my dreams will be just right
As I wake to another day,
I know that I will learn and play.
I will play with my father.
My neighbors and my brother.
I will play with my mother,
Play with my toys,
And all the rest of the neighborhood boys.
I will learn all kinds of things!
Like, why helicopters don't have wings.
Why airplanes, jets and ducks do.
How to tie my shoe.
Like gum in the hair is not a good thing.
What makes a bird sing.
I'll learn how to close a door.
Then I'll learn so much more!
...

This poem, like most of her writing and reading, was largely developed outside of the bounds of school on her own initiative and terms. While it is primarily for her own pleasure and sharing with family and friends, Pearl has an immense desire to reach a broader audience with her work.

At home, Pearl observed different types of learning while growing up. Her mother worked with her father to improve his reading using the engineering magazines that held his interest. She describes those interactions between her parents.

> Dad was a very bad reader by choice. So mom started him... I don't remember the name...on a magazine about mechanical stuff that she had bought. He would find something interesting and, "Oh look this is what it says!" and he would be reading something out loud to her. She would

> be reading something like *Readers Digest*, which was a standard when I grew up. *Readers Digest*, Readers Digest books, *Look* magazine, always a newspaper are the things that I grew up with.

Pearl easily recalls the books that were in her home. There were shelves with books she wasn't allowed to explore, and books that she read over and over, the first book her grandmother gave her, Nancy Drew and the Bobbsey Twins mystery series.

Nature continues to be another essential part of Pearl's life and describes herself as an avid naturalist who sets aside time to be outdoors. She refers to the Mississippi River as her childhood backyard playground, a place she and her family enthusiastically explored and she attributes her relationship to nature to two key individuals, her aunt and her grandmother.

> I remember long walks with Aunt Alice. I don't know what she did for a living but she was the smartest woman on the face of her earth because there wasn't anything she didn't know about. If you saw a little bug running across the road she would tell you what it was.... She knew bugs, she knew leaves, trees, grasses... everything. She could look at a mowed lawn and tell you what was in it.

Pearl saw a wisdom in these two women that came from their knowledge and experience with nature and continues this tradition with her boys. The entire family is actively involved in scouting, Pearl serving as the local Cub Scout leader. Her role in Scouts allows her to draw on her knowledge, take an active role in her sons' activities, and encourage her boys to become knowledgeable outdoors men. Frequent camping trips allow the family to hunt, fish, canoe and explore the local wildlife. They keep track of the birds that visit the feeders outside of their trailer, and when they happen to spot a bird they don't know, Pearl looks it up with the boys in a

bird reference book. Nature and hunting magazines can always be found in their living room, and Pearl's favorite books are all about wildlife. Not surprisingly she often draws on her knowledge of nature in her writing, through the metaphors she uses or as inspiration for her stories.

Being knowledgeable at home means something different than it does at school. Pearl places primary emphasis on having the resources to learn, to be able to find out what you want or need to know. Pearl fondly recalls the days when her parents sent her to the encyclopedias to find answers to her questions. She worries that her sons won't have these resources to learn and figure out things as they are out on their own in life:

> I think that 's important...which is frustrating to me because I don't feel that's what they are teaching the boys in school, particularly Logan who is to me is slipping back more and more each year and not gaining what he should. I wish someone would teach him how to figure it out.

Pearl places a high value on resourcefulness and persistence to find the answers you need to get along. This might entail reading, which Pearl often relies on, but it might also involve consulting one's own experience or asking those around you with more expertise. The knowledge that is essential at this home is often disconnected with what is taught at school and holds little tangible value for most people, especially if not accompanied by a diploma which our society proclaims as the ticket to success.

Pearl didn't leave school because of her academic problems but was asked to leave when she became pregnant with her oldest son. While the school hadn't condoned her marriage, administrators allowed her to continue with her education as long as she didn't take science and

physical education. Pearl still chuckles over this oddity. Her pregnancy, however, was unacceptable and she was finally forced to quit school. Pearl is confident that if circumstances had been different she would have graduated.

Out of school, Pearl eventually learned what it means to be labeled a dropout. She was not hired for jobs because she didn't have a diploma and later, she was passed over for promotions in favor of people who did. In response to the recent welfare reform Pearl wrote a letter to President Clinton expressing her frustration with welfare and her suggestions for changing it to really help families like her own. In the following excerpt she challenges the President and us to rethink the way we describe families, how we see and treat them, and our assumptions about families who rely on welfare.

...Have you ever been there, standing in line, at the grocery store and have someone loudly say, "Oh I can't be in this line. This is the food stamp line! ...Have you ever yelled at the T.V. when they describe for the public, "How lazy welfare people are and if they would work all their dreams could come true. What dreams! They have been drained from us by public prejudice, job discrimination, humiliation and family threats. ("You have to be lazy, otherwise you wouldn't be on that welfare crap. I can take those kids away from you and you can't do anything about it! You don't earn enough to be a fit parent!") Have you ever wanted to put your foot through the T.V. when you hear the lies about the people on welfare! But most of all have you ever just wished that we the people on welfare could tell you how to help people get off welfare. Well we can. We live it.

Pearl recognizes that her sons need a high school education but also knows that having the diploma doesn't necessarily signify that they are educated or will "make it" in life. She has encountered plenty of people with an education who haven't accomplished much and many more without one that have made something of themselves. Pearl and her husband enjoy "stumping" college-educated people they meet with trivia questions to prove this point.

Knowing a little of the history that Pearl brings to bear in constructing her stance toward the schools allows for a better understanding of her perspective and her position regarding her children's education. Her three elementary-age boys all experience difficulty in school and have been labeled learning disabled. She has been especially concerned for John, who this year is beginning third grade. Due to complications at birth John wasn't expected to live. Extreme intervention and brain surgery saved his life but there has always been uncertainty about his abilities. Pearl has been enthused with the smallest accomplishment he makes, more grateful that he is alive than concerned with keeping track of what he can and can't do. Her expectations have been lower for John than her other boys, not expecting him to be able to read or make progress through school. This year that all changed when John became a reader and a writer.

The first day of second grade was easier for John last year because he was returning to the same classroom and the same teacher, benefiting from a first/second grade combination classroom organization. Having learned that Pearl had written several children's stories and poems, his teacher, Ms. K. invited her in as a guest speaker midway through the fall semester. This invitation and Pearl's subsequent visit provided a new foundation for John's participation in the classroom and a basis for a stronger relationship between Pearl and Ms. K. Pearl was invited in as an author who also happened to be John's mother.

Pearl took the visit seriously, preparing her stories and creating illustrations, one of which she photocopied so that the children could color while they listened. Pearl also took the opportunity to share John's baby book with the class in order to explain why John sometimes has difficulty in school. She chose the theme of diversity to tie together her own writing and John's story. She shared the very first children's story she wrote, entitled *Bumper Bear*, about a small

bear who bumps his way thorough life before finding out that he needs glasses. She also shared a story about a baby peacock that is born without a tail and how the other animals react to this difference. Both of these stories served as an introduction to the sharing of John's baby book and an explanation of the way everyone is unique in a special way. Pearl explained each of the pictures in John's baby book and related his ordeal to the characters in her book. John basked in the attention and participated in the story. When Ms. K solicited questions from the children, they wondered where she got her ideas and how long it took to write her stories. To wrap up the visit, Ms. K asked Pearl what advice she had for all of the young writers in the class. Pearl then shared off the top of her head the very first poem she had written in second grade, telling the class how this experience had served to inspire her and that it was never too young to start. "Just keep writing!"

Pearl was exuberant as she walked out of the classroom a short thirty minutes after she had entered. Beaming with excitement, she expressed her amazement at how the children had responded to her writing and was especially impressed with the sophistication of their questions. It was a new feeling to have her work appreciated by the audience it was meant for. Moreover, she was encouraged by the children's expression of understanding about John's story.

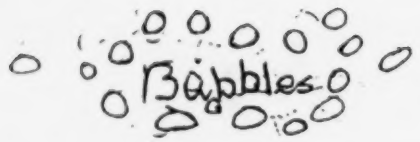
This seemingly simple visit helped to alter the tone of the relationship between Pearl and Ms. K. In the previous year there had been some concern about how language arts was being taught and uncertainty about John's progress in the regular classroom. Although Pearl wasn't completely certain of the classroom practices, there was a new level of trust in their relationship. Having Ms. K extend herself to understand and advocate for John and actually value and celebrate Pearl's contribution fostered trust where there had been suspicion. Beyond just

acknowledging her writing activities, there was a real recognition of Pearl's abilities as a writer in the nature of the invitation and during the visit itself . This was not the first time that Pearl had been asked into a class, or the first time that she shared her writing, but it was the first time that she was seen as an author who could inspire and convey the joy of writing to the children. In addition, as Ms. K conveyed John's progress and accomplishments, no matter how minor, Pearl began to reevaluate her expectations for John and see him as a reader and writer.

At home there were developments as well. The boys had already benefitted from seeing their mother sitting at the computer wrapped up in her writing, or reading aloud to family members to solicit their opinions. Recognition from others of their mom's writing abilities gave the boys a new respect and interest in her work. John and Logan, the sixth grader, began writing on the computer and had their own disks. In addition, Pearl became more proactive in encouraging and developing their writing, especially with Logan. She asked him questions about his writing so that he would embellish the language. In one example, she asked him to describe a blade of grass to her. She pushed his descriptive language by asking him to paint a picture with words. At school, Logan's improved descriptive language skills surfaced in a creative story about a shark attack (see Figure 2 on the next page) and at the end of the school year he and John shared their writing at a young-writers' workshop. Logan shared *Bubbles* and John shared his own version of *Bumper Bear* that he had worked on at home with his mother.

These developments, however, seem fleeting, almost inconsequential in the face of the boys' end-of-the-year evaluations. While small steps and progress were acknowledged, the message of the boys continued failure was unmistakable. Each of the boys advanced to the next grade but there was definite concern about the boys' future success in school. Is the real barrier

to genuine parent involvement a question of accountability? Both parties are suspicious of the other's performance and responsibility. Each year that one of her sons "advance" in school without making real progress only raises Pearl's anxiety. Instead of finding comfort in the school's assurances that they will get extra help and be with their peers, Pearl sees them getting further and further behind. How can schools overcome parents' negative schooling histories and the mistrust that parents bring to their interactions with the school? How can schools alter their view of families and the roles they envision for parent involvement to include the voices and views of parents like Pearl? How can teachers draw connections between the home and school literacy practices in order to benefit families who struggle with school literacy? There is an obvious contradiction between the school image of Pearl's family and the one that emerges from our case study. As a result, we are challenged to invent school practices that recognize and act on the contradictions that Pearl and her family present.



"Help! Help! Some one help me! All of a sudden
Water rushes over my head, As I was
jerked to the depthes below. I felt teeth
crushing my bones and tearing my flech. As I
was pulled deeper and deeper into the bloodling
merky, salty water. Pieces of my flech drifted past
my terrorized eyes. Shark attack!
Drifting in and out of reality, I suddenly
felt strangling sea weed rapping around my
throat. Thrashing, I surfaced and gold a
dep breth of air. Lurching back and fourth
through the water the attack started agian.
Whiping me through the water, the
shark drug me closer to sure death!
Waking safe and sound in my bed I
discovered my blankets were wrapped tightly
around my body. My gold fish steerd
hungrily from the security of his fish
boll The End

Figure 2. "Bubbles," written by Logan in sixth grade, with Pearl's encouragement.

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"I Just Can't Stand to Not Be Involved"

Ronda, a working class mother of three, finds her work at Parker Elementary School a necessity because she "just can't stand to not be involved" in her children's education. She attends school events and her children's classroom conferences, field trips, parties, etc. In addition, she organizes the room parents for the school, serves as PTO president and holds a part-time teaching assistant position. In these roles, she has initiated several projects to help bridge the gap between the school and the neighborhood, including an innovative school wide "Community Day" which brought members of the community into school to share their funds of knowledge with students. A challenging fund-raising campaign to build a new playground has been the focus of her recent efforts, including a benefit concert in the park that brought community members together to dance, sing, play, and eat to raise money. Undoubtably, Ronda could be described as an ideal involved parent. Are Ronda's obvious efforts and contributions to the school the causes of her successful relationships with teachers? We suggest the situation is more complex. An examination of Ronda, a very different mother than Pearl, will continue to shape our understanding of mothers in school.

The print in all homes provides insight into the lives of the people who live there and the Thompson house, home to Ronda, her husband, Tommy and their three children, is no exception. Walking up the back steps to their rented house a few doors from the school, a visitor would find literacy everywhere, just like in Pearl's home. For example, nine-year-old Brianna explains the colorful calendar attached to the refrigerator, "We each have a color so we all know where we have to be . . ." The chart shows children going to soccer, piano, tae kwon do, dance and girl scouts. Ronda is represented by green and not surprisingly, green marks every day of the month.

There are notations for her work with Habitat for Humanity, her job as volunteer coordinator at school, organizing madrigal dinners for the University, regular PTO meetings and PTO executive board meetings since she is the president.

It is ironic that visits to the Thompson house often begin in the kitchen because cooking and food are essential funds of knowledge in this family. It could be said that food holds this family together; food also connects Ronda's literate history to the work history of her family.

> My maternal grandparents and my parents worked together (about) . . .a year before I was born. And they had a restaurant and they had cabins . . . a gas station on the highway. And they built everything themselves, they built the house and the cabins and the house they lived in, the restaurant, everything. . . my mom started working when she was like 13 or so I think as a carhop at one of the drive-ins, typical '50's teenager, I guess. . . And me? I started working when I was 15, I guess, 14 or 15. And I worked in a lot of restaurants. . . people in my home town say I worked in every place in town. [laughs] (I worked in) lots of different restaurants. . . And then I worked with a CPA but that was no fun because by then the restaurants were in my blood. I worked at ChiChi's and Jo Kelly's as their corporate trainer and I'd wait tables unless there was a restaurant opening and (then I'd) train their new staff.

Food and the restaurant industry are central in Ronda's husband's life, too. By around fourteen years of age, Tommy was flipping burgers at a restaurant where his sister was a manager and he has been in the restaurant industry ever since. In fact, he and Ronda met as a result of their mutual decisions to make careers out of the food service business. They were introduced by Ronda's supervisor, who was a former co-worker of Tommy's. After moves from Missouri, Texas, and Louisiana, the Thompsons have settled in their current city where Tommy is the executive chef at one of the best restaurants.

Ronda's relationship with her mother is central to her daily life and she readily shares untold numbers of stories about her mother and their adventures (her father died when Ronda

was only three): collecting antiques, the Spitfire car that they both love, living in Kansas City near baseball players like George Brett, and a passion for conversation, as evidenced by a phone bill that Ronda challenges herself to control. Food links Ronda and her mom with literacy. Ronda regular calls to her mother for recipes prompted them at one point to compile not only their recipes but other favorite dishes from extended family members in a cook book. Ronda's dedication reads . . .

> I'd like to dedicate this cookbook to my mother. Not only is she an excellent cook, a great mom and a good person, but she is also a lot of fun to be around. Thank you, mother, for the recipes and the remembrances. I love you dearly! Ronda.

Literacy artifacts are found in every nook and cranny of the Thompson's home. Bookcases of books of all types, magazines, printed pages of schedules, handouts from school, children's school work, music, word games, embroidered messages, a guest book for visitors and writing tools, including pens, pencils, markers, paper, etc. abound. The family's interest in food preparation and the restaurant industry is confirmed in these artifacts. A basket in the living room overflows with cook books and gourmet cooking magazines. Handwritten notes about cooking protrude from books and lists for the grocery store lay on the counter. A warning sign written by Kaitlin hangs on the refrigerator reminding the family about their rule for using knives (see Figure 3).

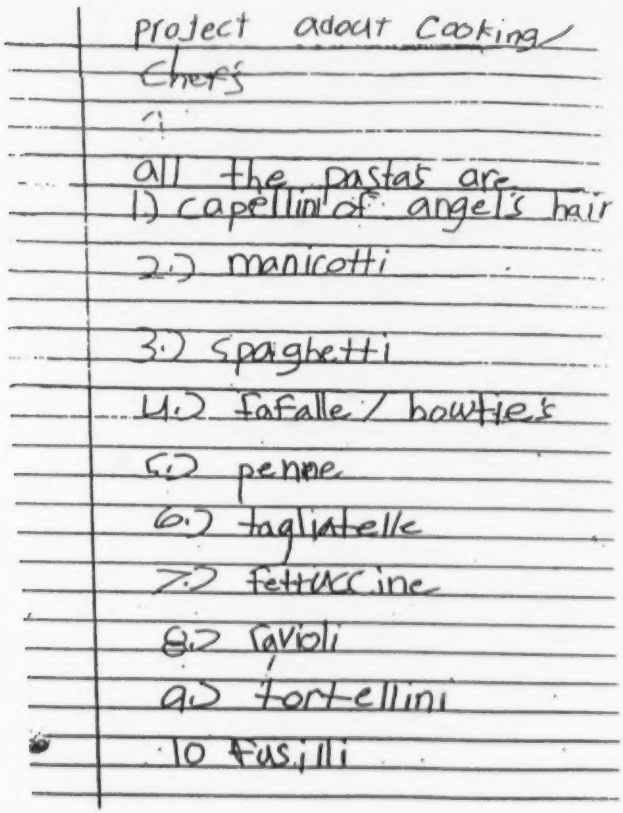

Figure 3. Kaitlin's sign to remind her family of kitchen rules.

The Thompson children are immersed in their parents' knowledge about food and use literacy and conversations to negotiate their own understanding and participation in that knowledge.

In fact, food, its preparation, and its related business aspects are often used by Ronda and Tommy in exchange for services to gain access and to garner acceptance from others. Ronda says her family used to prepare dinner parties for the family dentist in exchange for dental work. At school, she and Tommy use their skills and knowledge in food preparation and organization. During teacher appreciation week they collaborate to prepare a meal for the teaching staff that has become a valued and expected event in the school culture. At this event, teachers, staff and volunteer parents gather ritualistically in another parent's home to share exquisitely prepared

gourmet foods and celebrate the success of another year. Tommy also volunteers to teach children about cooking by welcoming field trips to his professional kitchen and participating in community day.

As any family, Ronda and Tommy have hopes and dreams for the future. They have plans to own a restaurant someday or to return to the family restaurant and cabin business that Ronda remembers from her childhood. Although Ronda wants her dream to become a reality by going to college to study business, she is unsure. The application has been on her desk for months because she worries her minimal GPA will be a detriment to her admission and she's apprehensive about her ability to do better academically in a second attempt. Ronda openly talks about how she was not successful in school herself. "I was not a good student. I was great at the socializing. I want the kids to be great at socializing, but I want them also to be great at the academic part, I feel very strongly about that, because I know that I could have done better had I just applied myself."

She continues, connecting her schooling history to her mother's lack of involvement in her academic development.

> I wasn't a bad student . . . (but) my mom didn't push me. She felt like it was important and she was involved in some ways in the school but, there wasn't alot of involvement in my school work. She would come to science fairs, open houses, (and the like)...(but) there wasn't a lot of "Have you done your homework?" (or) "What did you learn at school today?"....I think had my mom said, not just, "Do your homework," but, "What did you talk about?," if it had been part of the conversation, part of a daily "This is a cool thing that you're

> doing - Wow, that's neat!" then I would have been more apt to have cared about it more.

That is why, Ronda says, she is such a force in her own children's education. She emphasizes she "just can't stand to not be involved" in her children's education and has dedicated herself to being an advocate for her own children. Through her involvement, she strives to demonstrate to her children how important school is rather than to lecture them. In fact, her work at the school began as volunteer and grew into a paid position.

Ronda's personality helps her cultivate friendships easily with other parents and teachers. She is outgoing, expressive, energetic, creative and personable, making her easy to get along with and know. Her sense of humor often shows through when she is nervous or uncertain about her role, but it also puts those around her at ease and shifts the mood of any school event or meeting to a feeling of fun. Brianna's teacher agrees.

> She seems to be real optimistic and ambitious, and she seems to be real peaceful with her past. The events, things that have happened, they haven't stood in her way. She seems real upbeat. She likes life. She's real passionate and she's real committed to being involved in her kids' lives.

Ronda fosters social relationships with teachers out of school as well as during the normal school routines. She and one teacher held a long-running water balloon fight, for example, that brought the teacher to their home over the summer months. Teachers are often part of groups invited to the Thompson house for informal parties that might include playing games like Pictionary or Taboo, and Ronda occasionally babysits the younger children of teachers in the school. Each of these interactions invites opportunities for school connections outside of the

typical academic routine as the following story illustrates.

> ...This year we were at a bar, Angie and I...and several of the other teachers had gone to McDoogal's and we were talking...about trying to raise money to improve our playground. And she said, "What if (the teachers) did the Madrigal dinner?" I said, "No, anybody can do it but I don't feel comfortable going to the teachers and saying, 'Do this'."

Herein lies an interesting contradiction. While on the surface Ronda appears at home in her busy role in the school, she also says, "I feel like, it's funny, because I feel like at school like I don't belong." While teachers believe she "fits in" fine and see her as an essential member of the school community, Ronda wonders, "I just don't understand why I can't give orders here. If this were a restaurant, I wouldn't have any problems!"

As she struggles to find her niche in the school and to lead others when appropriate, Ronda continues to advocate for her children at home. Deliberate literacy teaching events are imbedded in the reading and writing that happen regularly in her home. On the end table sits a copy of the latest book Ronda is reading as a member of an all women book; she also describes the family's plan to read their way through the Laura Ingalls Wilder series. Occasionally the entire family will take a quiet time to write in journals, stories, or letters. When Ronda joined our parent literacy group, she had concerns about the difference between the spelling of Brianna, her oldest child, and Kaitlin a year younger. Kaitlin writes easily in conventional spelling, while Brianna relies heavily on invented spellings. Because of the tension between the sisters about the issue, Ronda struggles with how best to support each daughter and is careful to not compare their literacy skills. At the same time she intuitively contributes to Brianna's confidence as a writer,

by providing her with materials, time and response, as is evident in one of Brianna's stories, which is six pages and not even finished yet (the first page of the story is in Figure 4).

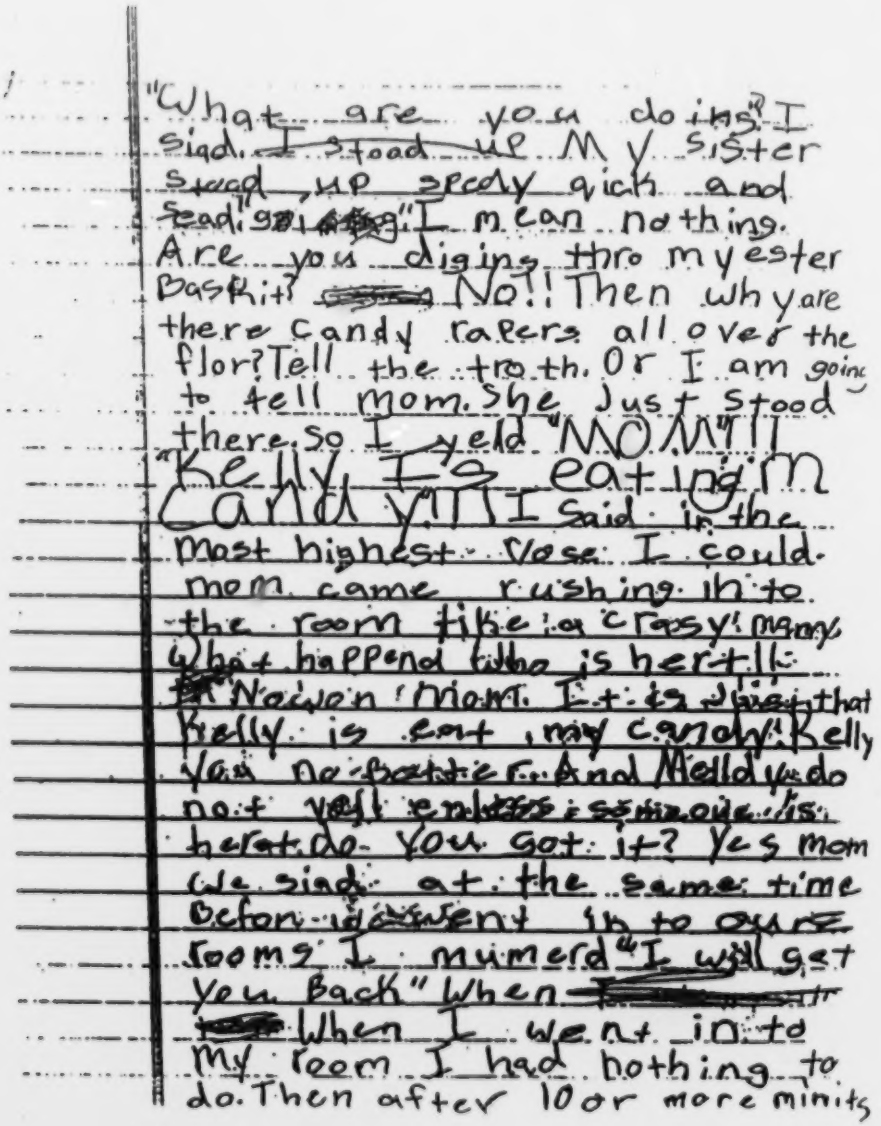
"What are you doing" I said. I stood up My sister stood up speedy quick and said "I mean nothing. Are you diging thro my ester Basket? No!! Then why are there candy papers all over the flor? Tell the truth. Or I am going to tell mom. She just stood there. So I yeld "MOM!!! Kelly Is eating m Candy!!!! I said in the most highest voice I could. mom came rushing in to the room like a crasy mom. What happend to ho is her!!! No Nolan mom. It is that Kelly is eat, my candy! Kelly You no better. And Mell you do not you! do it is mine. his here! do you got it? Yes mom we said at the same time Before I went in to our rooms I mumerd "I will get you Back" When When I went in to my room I had nothing to do. Then after 10 or more minits

Figure 4. The first page of a story written by Brianna.

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What can we learn from Ronda about the complexities of re-visioning parent involvement and parent-teacher relationships? Obviously, Ronda cares about her children and prioritizes their success in her own life choices. She devotes time to them at home and in other settings and she demonstrates a consistent interest in their activities and lives. She also teaches them, both by example and through more direct instruction, about her values (volunteering, education, literacy and family) and her strong personal interest in and knowledge about cooking and the food industry.

However, Ronda provides us with a set of contradictions that challenge simplistic definitions of what it means to be a "good" or "involved" parent. For example, Ronda's schooling history would cause most educators to predict that she would choose to distance herself or not feel comfortable in a school setting. Yet, in fact, she is one of the most active parents we have known in our combined histories in elementary schools. Given her self-chosen leadership role in the school, we might also expect her to be confident in that role. But she acknowledges that while she easily gives orders in a restaurant, in the school she feels very uncomfortable doing so. She frequently requests reassurance, asking others, "Do you think this will work?"

We might also predict that for some classroom teachers Ronda's diligent attention to her children's experience in the classroom and her constant attendance at events usually reserved for teachers (eating lunch every day in the teachers' workroom and going to teacher social functions, for example) might be intimidating or threatening. Rather, the teachers of Ronda's three children voice their appreciation. One teacher comments, "She's real up front, always asking questions. 'This is what's happening at home, what's going on at school?'" Another teacher contributes,

"Whatever we do in school she spends a lot of time talking about at home. She's always reading through the journals the kids write and is very interested in what they write. She tries hard to add to the classroom at home." Teachers confirm their comments by asking Ronda to serve on a variety of committees and seeking her ideas, particularly for community extensions.

Ronda demonstrates the tensions that exist between the power and trust relationships present in schools and suggests strategies for facilitating trust and re-visioning relationships. Her personality clearly plays a role in fostering rather than inhibiting relationships with teachers. Her sense of humor, friendliness and energy toward making the school a great place mediate a more symmetric power relationship with teachers than is usually assumed. Naturally and intuitively, she uses her strengths as a social person and her personal funds of knowledge to create her own place in the school.

Perhaps it is Ronda who best articulates her personal relationship with Parker Elementary School. "I would like to see the school accomplish making my kids excited about school, and I think that they are. I don't know if that's the school or if that's a combination of the school and home, I think that it has to be both. . ." Wise words from a woman who "just can't stand to not be involved."

Inventing School Community: What Can Educators Learn from Pearl and Ronda?

The goal of our study is to understand the conditions under which a diverse elementary school can invent a learning community. The case studies of Pearl and Ronda as literate women, framed by the context of the school community, propose concrete and compelling examples for theoretical interpretation. Our analysis suggests that a tension exists between the innovative forces of the process of inventing community and the shaping forces of the conventions of formal

elementary education.

Consider the complex relationship between an individual teacher and either of the two families described in this paper. For example, when Pearl wants to contribute her knowledge and life's experiences about nature, animal science and writing to her child's classroom curriculum, her own failure in school as a child, as well as her basic distrust of the school's image of her family prohibit her from feeling comfortable initiating such a contact, or even sitting for much time in a classroom. In addition, Pearl is challenged to find time in her work and scout schedules and is challenged to keep her family afloat in their world that is particularly marked by the challenges of poverty. Simultaneously, in instances when John's teacher has wanted to invent a curriculum that is based on the specific cultural backgrounds and knowledge of her students, she acknowledges a feeling of obligation and pressure to meet the content requirements for curriculum at her grade level. In addition, she has encountered criticism from other teachers, making such a decision very difficult and in fact, radical.

Pearl, like every parent, wants to be a part of her child's success in school, but cannot easily overcome her own negative schooling history or lack of trust and cannot envision her knowledge about writing and nature as legitimate in her children's classrooms. A literate behavior that is comfortable and habitual at home or at the campground is uncomfortable, scary and invalid at school. At the same time, John's teacher wants to invent a learner-sensitive curriculum, but encounters the conventional established curriculum of the district and the influence of other teachers' negative responses. What conditions are necessary, then, to maintain a dynamic tension so that community can be invented within the realistic conventions of schooling? Understanding these two women suggests three specific issues that mediate the

tension between invention and convention in this setting: implementation of a socio-cultural view of families that builds on the funds of knowledge that exist in all households, symmetric power and trust relations between community members, and consideration of teachers as professional decision makers. Each of these will be discussed next.

Sociocultural view of families.

Schools must recognize and validate that each family exists in a credible and useful history, culture and language, and that all families hold expertise that is essential for their survival in order for them to negotiate their position in society. When Pearl and her husband take their children camping, they are "living" the principles of nature and an appreciation for wildlife. One summer near their campsite, the family found a group of wild geese that were entangled in fishing line and faced injury or death if they weren't helped. As the family worked to free the animals and care for them, they used wildlife agencies as resources and considered the migration patterns of Canadian geese to create a time line for their rescue. In a dramatic end to the story, the geese were eventually saved, and following the experience Pearl and the children wrote a compassionate short story. The excerpt below joins Pearl and her husband after the geese were saved.

...Bill and I decided to take an early evening canoe ride. We went west around the bend from the campground away from the geese. In our absence, they returned to camp. On our way back we discovered a confused gosling, desperately trying to maneuver through the boat traffic back to the campground and off the lake. It was Speedy. Lost and confused away from the flock, Speedy was half swimming, half flying all over. Bill and I maneuvered our canoe between the

boat traffic and Speedy. We herded him to the east end of the lake. As we rounded the bend, Bill and I noticed the flock on shore. So we herded Speedy back to shore. Speedy climbed out of the water and spotted the flock. Honking a squeaky honk he ran back to the group like, "Hi Mom, I'm home!" A few chuckles from the adults and they bedded down for the night.

Later in the story, Pearl's sons taught some local teenagers about the geese.

Dad, Logan and I taught them a lot. How to recognize Grandpa by his pigeon-toed foot. Mother by her mannerisms. Speedy and the others. They observed the seed tops of the grass at the water's edge and hand harvested a bread sack full for the geese. They along with us taught the parkful of children about the geese. I knew the geese had met their purpose when I overheard the oldest teen say to a handful of children, "Remember, when you come out here this is the home of the geese, racoon, and wild birds. This is their land. We're just company for the weekend. Return it better than you found it."

In a parallel event in Ronda's home, funds of knowledge are also aught. The Thompson children and their parents regularly find themselves in the kitchen preparing a meal. One evening, vocabulary as well as cooking utensils flew as the family chopped, stirred, measured and tasted. The children set the table and assisted in each step of preparing the meal. As Tommy sprinkled a variety of spices into a sauce, he asked Kaitlin to identify the bow tie pasta that was soon to be simmering in a pot of boiling water nearby. "How long will it take to cook, Dad?" Chase asked. Soon the family gathered around the table and chatted about school, work and schedules over their delicious dinner. Later, Kaitlin included "bow tie" in growing list of types of pasta as part of a "project" she was doing for school (see Figure 5).

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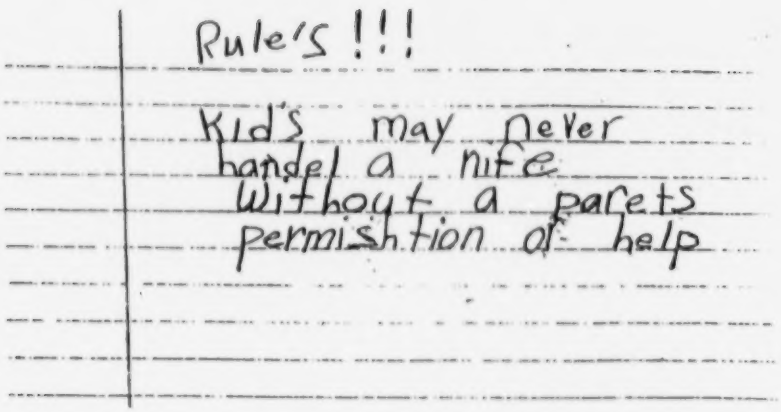

Figure 5. Kaitlin's "pasta project," completed at home.

Each of these examples demonstrates the highly intellectual funds of knowledge that are an integral and dynamic part of who these families are and how they negotiate relationships with each other and their environments. Greenberg (1989) refers to funds of knowledge as an "operations manual of essential information and strategies households need to maintain their well being" (p. 2). Nature for Pearl's family and cooking for Ronda's are such essential funds of knowledge.

Literacy is used in these households, too, as a tool to create, explore and use funds of knowledge for functional purposes (Wertsch 1991) and to exchange them with others in their neighborhoods and extended families (Moll & Greenberg 1990). In both homes, adults and children use oral and written language to remember, create, express emotion, document, figure out, investigate and relate to one another. Taylor & Strickland (1989) write, "Many of the

deliberate uses of literacy found in family settings occur when moment-to-moment uses of literacy are in some way lifted out of context to become specific events that are the focus of attention" (256). These mothers' actions suggest to us that funds of knowledge is one lens through which to identify such moment-to-moment literacy events and to move toward a sociocultural view of families in school.

Funds of knowledge can become the theoretical and the pragmatic mechanism that enables literacy to be a tool with which children and families can exchange funds of knowledge within the culture of the school, as well as in households. Our descriptions in this paper have highlighted moments when the funds of knowledge in Pearl's and Ronda's families have intertwined with the school, enabling them to invent unique roles as parents and contributing to the sense of community there. What keeps other parents from doing the same thing, or from contributing their funds of knowledge to the culture of the school more fully?

Symmetric power and trust relationships.

Parents must feel a sense of power in their position and be willing and comfortable with trusting teachers and administrators in order for community to be possible in a school. Teachers must also trust that parents, as children's first teachers, are supporting their children in many positive and proactive ways at home regardless of schools' assumptions about parents' individual and social backgrounds or belief systems.

In most schools, this means that relationships need to be re-visioned around the notions of power and trust. Ronda, even with notable daily involvement in her children's school, expresses the limited power she perceives in her role. Pearl, as the mother of children who are currently

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deemed to be failing in the educational system, demonstrates even less power and more frustration. She and her husband vocally and legitimately express their lack of trust in an educational system that has failed every member of their immediate family. Some of their criticism is warranted, as shown during child study meetings that pre-determine the futures of their sons with a focus on failure and an emphasis on defects. Yet the web of mistrust about the school in which they are caught ultimately works against their children's improvement in some cases. For example, they have recently accused their younger sons' teachers of not using phonics in their reading programs, and acted on their mistrust by purchasing Hooked on Phonics.

Ronda and Pearl are both distrustful of their own abilities as their children's teachers even though the events depicted in this paper prove otherwise. Their lack of power and a lack of recognition by the school serves to reinforce their lack of confidence regarding academics, thus changing two mothers who are strong, knowledgeable and assertive in other contexts into tentative, uncertain parents at school.

Lack of trust is clearly one barrier to more symmetric power relationships in schools. Re-visioning power and trust relationships might include being sure that a parent truly feels a sense of welcome and comfort in a building, perhaps by inviting parents into the school as "wise" and contributing members of the *academic* and *intellectual* culture for its students. Both Pearl, when she had the role of expert author and Ronda, when she organized a special food event for teachers, became more confident and comfortable when their talents were acknowledged. A shift in their interpersonal relationships with teachers at Parker as a result suggest the potential that can be reached when dynamics between mothers and teachers are based on shared respect and knowledge about one another. Ronda, in particular, provides an example of this potential as she

benefits from more intimate relationships with her children's teachers, even though simultaneously she minimizes recognition of her leadership role.

Schools must move beyond superficial adaptations of parent involvement in schools, however, in order to shift power structures. If we "recognize the legitimacy of children's [and, we add, parents'] social existence and use it as a basis for curriculum and instruction" (Taylor & Strickland 1989, p. 275) we will enable parents to redefine their home-based strengths in the context of the school. In particular, the literacy events and funds of knowledge that authentically and naturally teach children in the contexts of their homes can be the impetus for more authentic teaching in classrooms.

Teacher as professional decision maker.

The potential exists for teachers to be deliberate, intentional mediators in the dynamics of home and school relationships so that power is shared and all mothers' (and father's) voices are valued. How? By investigating what funds of knowledge exist in the households of a classroom of children, examining and changing our assumptions about families and knowledge (especially low SES families), and using these forces to plan curriculum in partnership with parents.

Teachers' decisions in their classrooms are central to the dynamics of home-school relationships. However, the teachers in Parker Elementary, like many teachers, are likely to make classroom decisions because of non-theoretically-based factors, such as: perceived expectations of parents - to give spelling tests, perhaps; constraints imposed by the district or administration - to teach from a specified science kit at a certain time in the year, for instance; or the implied or direct opinions of other teachers in their building - made known through critical

comments about noise in the hall, for example (Whitmore 1995).

Teachers must feel a sense of confidence and power as professionals to make decisions based on their personal theories about teaching and learning, especially when that theory conflicts with the conventional thought around them. The act of inviting a known welfare parent into a classroom as an expert, as Ms. K did with Pearl, might be a tenuous step in some schools. To push even further by inventing curriculum around the funds of knowledge of the students in a class, as we are suggesting, can be even more radical.

While teachers grow to value their own judgements based on their personal theories of learning and teaching, and make decisions accordingly, Taylor says teachers must also become comfortable "...relinquishing [their] roles as experts" in recognition of parents' knowledge about their children, "assuming the role of neophyte each time we work with a child and his or her family... (1993 p. 14). She explains:

> In trying to understand the educational influences in the lives of young children, then, our task is to listen and to observe and not to restrict ourselves to the information present on a questionnaire. If we are willing, we can become privy to the multiple levels of experience that are characteristic of family life, and we can gain some understanding of the "trivial" details that are so important in the education of the child (p. 15).

We propose that such a willingness to share power with parents through our respect for their knowledge, along with confidence to make decisions based on our own professional knowledge will lead to the possibility of community in school.

Conclusion

An inventive energy exists in schools that can be used to create community. We believe all teachers, administrators, parents, and children hope for and want "community" but may not have realized the paradigmatic changes that are necessary to bring their hopes to fruition in real schools and classrooms.[4] Obviously, inventing community would be an easily achievable goal, not even worthy of study, if teachers and parents lived and worked in a homogeneous context without the challenges of different backgrounds and individually varied expectations. In reality, of course, schools do exist in challenging contexts that are socially constructed, politically charged, and historically and culturally grounded.

Thus, the conventions of the formal public educational system of which Parker Elementary teachers and families are a part present a counter force against the invention energy. The schooling histories of parents and teachers, the assumptions all community members have about the role of parents in school, and the requirements of the district for curriculum content, use of time and space, policies and procedures all shape the dynamics of a school community.

Our analysis suggests that until families are viewed from a sociocultural perspective, power relations are more symmetric, and teachers act as informed professional decision makers "school as community" will be a difficult, if not impossible goal to accomplish. On the other hand, however, when a dynamic tension exists between the individual literacies of community members and the social literacies that are conventional, home and school relationships offer

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[4]In addition, "community" is conceptualized ambiguously in real schools and in the research and practice literature, however, this is a topic for a discussion of more depth and range than this paper. Please see Whitmore (forthcoming) for this discussion.

inspiring opportunities for inventing community.

As educators examining the way parents in one school negotiate and use different dimensions of literacy within their communities, we are challenged to re-vision the potential of home literacies as informative for school practice. Our view of each home as a practicing educational setting, rich with resources and expertise, alters the lens through which families are valued. Therefore, families that would normally not be accepted or welcomed within schools become important resources and teachers' expectations for children and families that might traditionally be labeled "at risk" are redefined. Our study suggests that we can diversify the voices that are involved in classrooms and schools, empowering all parents to make connections between home and school and re-valuing the potential of schools to transform practice by learning from parents and families.

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